



The Job of the Board

The library Board is responsible for all that happens within the library and its outreach programs.

This statement might be a little intimidating to a new trustee, but it is both a legal and practical way of looking at the job you accepted. The Board does not manage the day-to-day operations of the library but, rather, is responsible for seeing that the library is well managed in accordance with the law and Board-established policies. To meet this responsibility, the Board has six major tasks:

- ✓ Understand the laws governing the library
- ✓ Hire and evaluate the library director
- ✓ Set and monitor the library's budget
- ✓ Set policy
- ✓ Plan for the future of the library
- ✓ Advocate for the library in the community and for the community as a Board member

Each of these areas is addressed in later chapters of this handbook.

Board Meetings

The most important work of the Board is carried out at the Board meetings. First, individual trustees have no legal authority over the library. Any change in policy or procedure, or other governing act, must be brought before the Board. Second, the Board only has authority when it makes a group decision in a legally constituted meeting.

Information about
Nonprofit Boards
www.help4nonprofits.com

For articles about leadership
and management,
search the online
InfoTrac database on your
library's web site.

The Board bylaws provide the structure of your work, but here are some general guidelines for effective meetings.

- Be as productive as possible. Deal only with appropriate issues and make a clear distinction between the functions of the Board and those of the director.
- Ensure that the director is present at all Board meetings.
- Rotate leadership responsibilities to create a stronger Board; each trustee should have the opportunity to hold office.
- Hold regularly scheduled meetings, as listed in your bylaws. Select specific dates, times and places six to twelve months in advance.
- Follow procedures for conducting business meetings as outlined in *Robert's Rules of Order*. If this seems too formal, the chairperson should devise a specific order of business that maintains an orderly flow for the meetings.
- Keep an archival file of Board minutes in the library. Individual Board members should retain current minutes in their trustee handbooks.
- Hold working Board sessions and committee meetings prior to the formal Board meetings where decisions are made. This saves time and provides an opportunity for careful study of an issue.
- Remember: Committees issue recommendations to the Board but do not make the decisions. Written committee reports distributed before the Board meetings are most effective.
- Meetings must be open to the public and held in accessible locations. (See Public Participation, Chapter 3-4.)

Typical Board Meeting Agenda

1. Call to order
2. Roll call (needed to judge a quorum)
3. Open time to address the Board
4. Approval of previous minutes
5. Reports of officers, director and standing committees
6. Reports of special committees
7. Unfinished business: items that are carried over from a previous meeting or items that have been postponed to the next meeting
8. New business: members may introduce new items of business or move to take from the table any item that is on the table
9. Announcements
10. Program or speaker (if one)
11. Adjournment

- The minutes should include the date, time and place of the meeting; the names of Board members present and absent; the substance of all matters proposed, discussed or decided, and a record of votes taken; the names of citizens who appeared and the substance of their testimony; and other meeting information that Board members request be entered in the record.

Chairing the Board

It is a good idea for the Board to rotate leadership positions. The trustee serving as the Board chairperson facilitates the Board meetings with the help of the director.

Before the scheduled meeting, the chairperson and director should prepare an agenda and schedule adequate time for the items listed. This agenda, along with related materials, should be mailed to the trustees to give them time to prepare for the meeting. The agenda and the meeting date, time and place should also be posted or published.

To get the meeting under way, the chairperson should:

- ◆ Start on time with roll call.
- ◆ Introduce visitors and/or new Board members.
- ◆ Review the agenda, revising the order if necessary.
- ◆ Establish time limits.

During the meeting, the chairperson should make sure that participants:

- ◆ Focus on issues at hand.
- ◆ Follow the agenda and procedures stated in the bylaws.
- ◆ Establish action items: who, what and when.

At the end of the meeting, the chairperson should:

- ◆ Review and summarize for the minutes the meeting's progress, decisions and assignments.
- ◆ Announce next meeting date.
- ◆ Adjourn the meeting.

After the meeting, the chairperson and director work together to make sure that the meeting minutes are mailed to all Board members.

Public Participation

Montana law requires that tax-supported libraries be subject to the **Montana Open Meeting Law**. The purpose of this law is to ensure that the public has the ability to know how its business is being conducted. The legal requirements for open meetings, however, should be seen as the minimum requirements. From an administrative and community relations point of view, the more open you can make your meetings, the better it will be for the library.

The State Library recommends that public meetings be announced at least a week in advance. An agenda indicating the expected action items should be included with the meeting notice whenever possible.

It is sometimes difficult for trustees to speak candidly with the public or media representatives watching and listening. However, keep in mind that you have been chosen to represent a large number of people. Those who show up at a Board meeting usually represent a very small percentage of your constituents and should not have an undue influence on your actions.

The Board should have a clear policy about regulating the activity of members of the public who attend Board meetings (see sample on facing page). The public participation policy should be easily visible. Consider including it in the meeting notice as well as posting it on the library bulletin board.

Public participation does not mean that the public takes over the meeting. The Board chairperson should welcome public comment at appropriate times, but the amount of time made available for this is at the chairperson's discretion. Remember: Your Board meeting is a meeting conducted in public, not a public meeting. In other words, the public and media are there to watch you

Guidelines for Effective, Efficient Meetings

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Post and use ground rules: <i>We participate as equals.</i> <i>We discuss openly and honestly.</i> <i>We disagree with grace and tact.</i> <i>We don't hide disagreements or questions.</i> <i>We stick to the agenda.</i> <i>We enjoy each other's company.</i> | 2. Follow timed agenda and agree to go beyond time limits only by formal motion. |
| | 3. Use issue sheets to summarize discussion points. |
| | 4. Record on flipcharts to focus discussion. |

Sample Public Participation Policy

The _____ Library Board welcomes public input at its meetings. Each agenda item (unless specified otherwise) will be open for public input before the Board deliberates on that item. While it is recommended that anyone wishing to address the Board notify the director at least 48 hours before the meeting so that time may be reserved for such input, it is not absolutely necessary.

Everyone wishing to speak must fill out a form to allow for accurate spelling of names and identification of those speaking on the various items for inclusion in the official minutes of the meeting. The form is available on the table at the rear of the meeting room.

Since time is limited, the Board chair reserves the right to set reasonable time limits for public input on each topic. Normally, a person will be limited to five minutes per agenda item.

During Board deliberation, the public is asked not to make any comments unless responding to a specific question asked by the Board chair.

Thank you for your interest in the library and the Board, and for your assistance in keeping our meetings orderly.

work, not to participate. (See Chapter 4-4 for more on this law.)

Board Bylaws

The Board's bylaws provide the general structure for your work and ensure continuity and consistency in legal, financial and policy-making activities. Bylaws should be periodically reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant.

Typically, the Board bylaws include the following articles:

Article I. Name of the organization

Article II. Object and reason for the group's existence

Article III. Members

Qualification for membership, types of membership such as honorary, attendance requirements, resignation, dues/fees, who can vote, how members are appointed and removed, filling vacancies, etc.

Article IV. Officers

When elections are held, nominations, voting, filling vacancies as well as the term of office and duties of officers.

Article V. Meetings

Quorums, meeting dates and times, how to call a special meeting.

Article VI. Executive Board or Board of Directors

The executive board duties and responsibilities.

Article VII. Committees

Names of standing committees, membership, selection of members, attendance and duties.

Article VIII. Parliamentary Authority

Clearly stated rules of order and a system for resolution of discord.

Article IX. Amendment of Bylaws

Details on procedure for changing bylaws including required notice and vote.

Some organizations have additional articles for finances, policies, discipline and other matters. A source for information about bylaws is *Robert's Rules of Order*.

Comparing the Roles of the Library Board and the Library Director

The following examples of the duties of library Boards and directors illustrate the similarities and differences in the role of the Board and the role of the director.

BOARD

1. Employ a competent and qualified director.
2. Develop a long-range plan, vision and mission statements and review them periodically.
3. Determine and adopt written policies governing operation and program of the library. Review policies periodically.
4. Determine the goals and objectives of the library and methods of evaluating progress toward meeting them. Secure adequate funds to carry out the library's program.
5. Establish, support, and participate in planned public relations and marketing program.
6. Assist in preparation of the annual budget and approve it.
7. Present the budget to the funding agency, public officials, and the general public; explain and defend it.
8. Monitor budget expenditures during the fiscal year.
9. Know local and state laws; actively support library legislation in the state and nation.

DIRECTOR

1. Employ personnel and supervise their work.
2. Provide input to the Board on regional/national library issues and statewide trends in library management.
3. Suggest needed policies for Board consideration. Carry out the policies as adopted by the Board.
4. Prepare regular reports with library's current progress and future needs. Suggest and carry out plans for extending library's services.
5. Maintain active public relations program.
6. Prepare an annual budget in consultation with the Board. Give a current report of expenditures against the budget at each meeting.
7. Closely follow the budget process. Provide leadership in supporting the budget.
8. Oversee expenditures from budget including selection and ordering of all library materials and equipment.
9. Know local and state laws; actively support library legislation in the state and nation.

Evaluating the Board

It is a good idea for the Board to periodically take a few minutes and do a self-assessment. One way you can do this is to use the following questions. First, answer them individually. Then the Board as a whole can discuss what if any changes are needed.

| | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Our Board prepares to do its job by: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Conducting a thorough orientation for all new members. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Integrating new members into the team as quickly as possible. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attending Board development workshops. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing monthly development activities for members. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Performing an in-depth annual self-evaluation of board operations. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing all members with copies of the mission statement, bylaws, long-range plan and other important documents. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Touring all facilities at least once a year. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our Board ensures good meetings by: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Limiting most meetings to two hours or less. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing a comfortable meeting room conducive to business. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Convening and adjourning on time. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sticking to the prepared agenda. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Working for consensus rather than fighting for a majority. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Following a businesslike system of parliamentary rules. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Including the library director as a resource for all deliberations. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Confining all discussion to Board issues. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Allowing/encouraging all members to participate in discussion. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Adapted from *The Board Team Handbook: A Complete Guide to Boardsmanship Basics for the Board Team of the 90's*, published by the Cain Consulting Group, 1992.